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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: YAKUBU GOWON DISCUSSES BOKO HARAM,  
ELECTORAL REFORM, PFIZER

Classified By: Political Counselor James McNulty for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

¶1. (C) Ambassador, DCM and Poloff met with former Head of State (1966-75) Yakubu Gowon July 31 to discuss Boko Haram violence, pharmaceutical testing and electoral reform. Ambassador thanked General Gowon for his role in settling the case between Pfizer pharmaceutical company and Kano State over testing of the experimental drug Trovan during a 1996 meningitis outbreak. (Note: A U.S. \$75 million settlement was announced the day before. End note.) Gowon expressed satisfaction with the outcome and commented that "There is always an element of risk which has to be accepted" in the testing of new drugs.

¶2. (C) Gowon lamented the recent violence in the north provoked by Boko Haram as "a disturbing repeat of the 1980 Maitatsine uprising." (Note: In December 1980, a disaffected, anti-establishment group led by radical Muslim preacher Mohammed Marwa Maitatsine provoked religious riots and clashes with police and military that resulted in over 1000 deaths. End note.) "It's a pity, particularly so soon after Jos," Gowon continued, referring to December 2008 riots in Plateau state. Gowon, who was unaware of the summary execution of Boko Haram leader Mohammed Yusuf by police the night before, expressed an understanding of police anger when informed of the killing. The Ambassador pointed out that extrajudicial killings do not conform to the President's stated respect for the rule of law, and Gowon agreed.

¶3. (C) On electoral reform, Gowon noted his participation in an election monitoring team in Ghana and expressed his belief that things will change in Nigeria, given that "everyone condemns the status quo except INEC," (the Independent National Electoral Commission.) Ambassador asked if he had been at the Council of State meeting at which the Uwais report of the Electoral Reform Commission (ERC) was considered, and where he stood on the matter. Gowon responded affirmatively, opining that "INEC should be independent, not appointed or controlled by the government." He endorsed multiday elections, and felt the GON should not send "instructions or advice" on the disqualification of candidates, as it has done in the past. Nevertheless, he recognized that constitutional considerations complicated reform.

¶4. (C) Ambassador expressed appreciation for General Gowon's constructive comments regarding the President's visit to

Ghana, namely that Nigerians should not be jealous of the visit, but use it as motivation to transform the country into a first choice destination for future Presidential visits. Ambassador said she had recounted his comments in an interview, stressing that the focus should be on the message, not the venue.

SANDERS